Intellectual Discourse, 2006
Vol 14, No 1, 89-106

Tawḥīd and Trinity: A Study of Ibn Taymiyyah's *al-Jawāb al Ṣaḥīḥ*

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Abstract: Ibn Taymiyyah wrote the six-volumed *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ li Man Baddala Dīn al-Masīḥ* in response to the short treatise of 24 pages by the Melkite Bishop of Saida in modern Lebanon. A textual analysis of *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* proves the versatility of its author and the consistent method he had adopted in correcting the erroneous views held by Christians, Muslim innovators and hypocrites concerning God, Trinity, Incarnation and other aspects. Using revelational and rational arguments, he argues the authenticity of Islam as a way of life and its messenger as a mercy for mankind.

Throughout history, there were numerous Muslim-Christian debates pertaining to the Christian belief in Trinity. The earliest known debate between these two great religions is between Patriarch Timothy I, the head of the Nestorian Church in the East, and the Abbasid Caliph al-Mahdī (ruled 775-85 C.E).[1] Since then, numerous debates have taken place from time to time and these were largely polemical due perhaps to the dogmatic attempts of the followers of the two religions to prove the truths of their creeds.

A number of works on Christianity and its teachings have been written by scholars like al-Bāqillānī, ʿAbd al-Jabbār, and Ibn Ḥazm, among others.[2] The central issue of these Muslim-Christian debates is the deityship of Jesus, a doctrine inseparable from Trinity. Muslims rejected both the deityships of Jesus and Trinity as these contradict *tawḥīd*, the absolute unity of God. They reacted adversely to the idea of Jesus as the "only begotten Son of God," "incarnation" and "the Trinity." They questioned the authenticity of the Bible in terms

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of both the text and interpretation. They argued that Christianity has been corrupted from the original message of Jesus with its essential *tawḥīdic* element into a Hellenistic, Romanian and Trinitarian religion by later comunities.[3]

Among those who refuted the Trinitarian belief, Ibn Taymiyyah stands out.[4] The purpose of this paper is to analyse the methodology and approach adopted by Ibn Taymiyyah in refuting the Trinitarian concept elucidated and defended by Church fathers.

Background

Taqiyu al-Dīn Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm b. ʿAbd al-Salām b. ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Khiyār b. Muḥammad b. al-Khiyār b. ʿAli b. ʿAbd Allah b. Taymiyyah al-Ḥarrānī, known as Ibn Taymiyyah, was born on the tenth day of Rabīʿ al-Awwal, 661 A.H./1263 C.E. in Ḥarrān, a city near Damascus. Forced by the Mongol invasion and destruction of Ḥarrān, Ibn Taymiyyah along with his family members migrated to Damascus.[5] Here, he acquired an extensive knowledge of Islamic sources and disciplines: the Qurʾān, the *ḥadīth,* jurisprudence (*fiqh)* and its principles (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), Arabic language, and theology (*ʿilm al-kalām*). He is reported to have memorized the Qurʾān during his adolescence.

After the death of his father in 1282 C.E., he took over his father's position as scholar and delivered lectures on the exegesis *(tafsīr*) of the Qurʾān. He is known for his knowledge, asceticism, piety, and following closely the way of the *salaf* (the earliest generation of Muslims). Ibn Taymiyyah abhorred *taqlīd* (blind imitation) and promoted and practised *ijtihād* (educated and informed independent judgment to establish a legal opinion). Although Ibn Taymiyyah was educated in the Ḥanbalī school of thought, he reached a level of scholarship that was beyond the confines of that school. He was fully versed in the opinions of the four schools that led him to the conclusion that blind adherence to any one school would bring a Muslim into conflict with the spirit of Islamic law based on the Qurʾān and *sunnah*.[6]

Ibn Taymiyyah is a *mujtahid* (one who exerts the utmost to form an independent legal opinion) and fought the enemies of Islam. He relied on revelation as the only source of knowledge about God and

a person's religious duties towards Him. The human intellect (ʿ*aql*) and reason must be subservient to revelation. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, the only proper use of ʿ*aql* is to understand Islam in the way the Prophet (SAS) and his companions did, and then to defend it against deviant sects. He argued that the *ijmā*ʿ (community consensus) is of no value if it does not rest on the two divine sources. He allowed analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) and the argument of utility (*maṣlaḥah*) provided both rested on the objective givens of the Qurʾān and the sunnah.

Ibn Taymiyyah lived at a time when the Islamic world was suffering from external aggression and internal strife. The crusaders had not been fully expelled from the Holy Land, and the Mongols had all but destroyed the eastern Islamic empire when they captured Baghdad in 656AH/1258CE. In Egypt, the Mamluks had just come to power and were consolidating their hold over Syria. A large Christian evangelical movement was mounting to censure Islam and had become emboldened to disparage Islam and composed works on the alleged truthfulness of Christianity, and to invite theological debate.

Within Muslim society, Ṣūfī orders were spreading beliefs and practices not condoned by Islam. A so-called Muslim sect, known as the Batinites, with their creed based largely upon Magian doctrine, was conspiring to destroy Muslims. A ṣūfī sect, called the Rifāʿiyyah, with its neo-platonic gnosticism and Hindu pantheistic ideas, had introduced the concepts of divination, the practices of worshipping, supplicating to saints and the use of charms and spells into Islam. The orthodox schools of jurisprudence were stagnant in religious thought and practice.

It was in this setting of turmoil and conflict that Ibn Taymiyyah formulated his views on the causes of the weakness of the Muslim nations, refuted Trinity and some practices in Ṣufism, pantheism, and scholastic theology, criticised the tyrannical, unjust and misleading actions of rulers and scholars, and stressed the need to return to the Qurʾān and the *sunnah* as the only means for revival. Consequently, Ibn Taymiyyah courted the wrath of the ṣūfīs, his fellow Sunni scholars and of the ruling authorities. He was exiled and imprisoned numerous times and finally died in prison in Damascus at 728 A.H./1328 C.E.[7]

Ibn Taymiyyah left a considerable body of work characterized by its rich documentation, sober style, and brilliant polemic. In addition to innumerable *fatāwā* (legal opinions), two works have received special attention: *Al-Siyāsat al-sharʿiyyah* (Treatise on Juridical Politics) and *Minhaj al-sunnah* (The Way of Tradition). However, his six volume study, *Al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ li Man Baddala Dīn al-Masīḥ* (the apt answer to the one who changed the religion of the Christ) also deserves equal attention. Ibn Taymiyyah also wrote five other treatises in response to Christianity.[8] However, this study focuses mainly on the methodology and the arguments advanced in *Al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ*.

The Contents and the Method

Al-Jāwab al-Ṣaḥīḥ contains rich information on Islam, Christianity, and such extinct Islamic sects which were attracted to Christianity. This work was written in 1320 on public demand and in response to a short treatise of 24 pages entitled "A Letter to a Muslim" by Paul of Antioch, the Melkite Bishop of Saida.[9] This treatise, written after due consultation with Church leaders, attempts to establish six points. They claim that: (1) Prophet Muḥammad (SAS) was not sent to mankind, but rather to the pagan Arabs; (2) Prophet Muḥammad (SAS) extolled Christianity as a religion; (3) previous religions and scriptures bear testimony to the truth and validity of their religion; (4) Christians are monotheists; (5) their belief concerning the trinity is demonstrable by rational argumentation; and (6) Christianity as a religion is perfected by Jesus who came after Moses and hence they are not in need of any new message or religion.

In response, Ibn Taymiyyah wrote the six volumes published by Dār al-ʿĀṣimah publication, Riyadh. The first volume analyzes the Christians' claim that Muḥammad (SAS) was sent only to the Arabs of the *Jāhiliyyah* period and argues that Prophet Muḥammad (SAS) was sent as a messenger for all mankind. The second volume attempts to prove that the Christians distorted (*taḥrīf*) their scriptures and altered (*tabdīl*) the tenets of their beliefs. The third and fourth volumes are devoted to the question of trinity explaining the doctrinal origins of this belief, its theological position, and revelational as well as rational grounds upon which this belief is based. He argues that the doctrine of the trinity is an innovation unsubstantiated by

any authoritative injunctions. In the fifth volume, Ibn Taymiyyah presents epistemological questions on the Trinitarian concept, particularly on the logical relationship between the intellectual (*ʿaql*) knowledge and the knowledge obtained from the revealed tradition (*naql*). The final volume summarises the arguments and concludes by showing the superiority and necessity of Islam, which is a perfect combination of all that is good and just. The book teaches the Muslims and others how to think when studying Christianity. It presents both logical and scriptural arguments in its refutation of Christianity.

In the introduction to the volume, Ibn Taymiyyah makes it clear that his intention is not to list the Christian sects and their historical background, but to analyse their theological positions and concepts of God, trinity, incarnation and other Christian beliefs. His main objective is to substantiate the distinction between the creator and his creations. Since God is the "Realm Ideal Being" which is totally other than the realm of actual being or creation, He is really the one and only Transcendent being. His assessments are based both on scriptural and theological analyses.

Though *Al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* is concerned with Christianity that has deviated from the original teachings of its Prophet, it also discusses some heretical practices among the Muslims. He sought to show that the Christians' errors in "changing the religion of Christ" was also prevalent among Muslims of earlier generations as well as his contemporaries. Ibn Taymiyyah calls them hypocrites and the innovators. Hypocrites are those who outwardly profess faith in all the teachings of the Prophet (SAS), but secretly loath his message, like the renegades (*malāḥidah*) and the Batinis. Renegades, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, are in greater error than the Christians, whereas the innovators are those who profess the generality of the message of the Prophet (SAS) but are confused about the true teaching of Islam. Unless Muslims reject these tendencies toward unverified innovation in theology and practice, they would also depart from the true teachings of the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth*.[10]

Ibn Taymiyyah presents a critique of the Trinitarian theology from an Islamic perspective. He employs both revelation and rational evidence to refute Paul of Antioch's defense of the concept of Trinity. He did not rely only upon the Qurʾānic *āyāt* and *aḥādīth* but also quoted relevant passages from the Bible to substantiate his arguments

on the inaccuracy of the Trinity.[11] For Ibn Taymiyyah, this is crucial, since verifications and justifications ought to be based on evidence taken from texts and traditions.

In his theological evaluations and analyses of beliefs and Trinity, Ibn Taymiyyah adopted a consistent methodology. He presents, first, the reasoning and argumentation of Christians, and the background in which the arguments are presented. He quotes the exact wording of what they have stated, chapter by chapter. This is followed by his response and commentaries based upon rational and scriptural verifications and justifications. For instance, in his argumentation against the Christians' understanding on divine indwelling, he preceded his exposition with the relevant quotation from Paul of Antioch's writing.[12] Then, he proceeded with the analysis of each statement and even words cited therein. He refuted the pantheistic idea, that is, *ḥulūl* (divine indwelling) as attributed to Abu Yazīd al-Bistāmī. He substantiated his arguments by citing and explaining relevant Qurʾānic verses and *aḥādīth* invalidating such concepts.[13] Ibn Taymiyyah takes the arguments adduced by the Christians and turns the same arguments to prove the error in Christian thinking and to manifest the corrupt nature of their teaching. The same applies to the arguments of hypocrites and the innovators in Islam. He turns the arguments used by the innovators to prove that they are indeed in manifest errors.

The central idea in Ibn Taymiyyah's argumentation is his conviction that all aspects of the Trinitarian doctrine are contrary to the teachings of all Prophets and even against the teachings of Christ. The Qurʾān denounces the notion that Jesus is God or part of God, but it recognizes Jesus as one of the prophets of God. The Qurʾān (5:116-117) says:

> And behold! Allah will say: 'O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah?' He will say: 'Glory to Thee! never could I say what I had no right (to say). Never said I to them aught except what Thou didst command me to say, to wit, 'worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord.'

On Trinitarian questions, Ibn Taymiyyah divided his discussions into six sections beginning with the philosophical explanation of Trinity, followed by the divine hypostases (*aqānīm*), the incarnation

of the divine word in Christ, the *ḥulūl* (indwelling of God in Christ), the Qurʾānic teaching of Jesus, and lastly on the *ittiḥād* (union of God with a creature). The following discussion follows the same sequence.

Explanation of Trinity

On the explanation of Trinity, Ibn Taymiyyah quotes Paul of Antioch's claim that "the Muslims reject our belief in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as well as our view that they are three hypostases, and that Christ is the Lord, God, and Creator.… If they really understood that by this belief of ours we mean that God is something living and speaking, then they would not reject our holding it." [14]

Ibn Taymiyyah responded by stating that the Christians were only portraying the three hypostases as something philosophical. They seemed to prove the life and speech of God as something proven with observation and reason. However, the belief of these three hypostases had originated from the Gospel where Christ said "Baptise in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."[15] Ibn Taymiyyah said:

> The origin of their belief is what they claim to have been received from revealed religion, not that they have proved the life and speech of God which they then assert by these expressions. But this is what they have claimed in their argumentation.[16]

Hence, the three hypostases are not something deduced from observation and rational approach. He argues that the Christians' descriptions of "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" could neither be traceable in the terms used by followers of any religion nor preached by the Prophets. Hence, their explanations contain no religious or rational basis. In fact, to him, all beliefs related to trinity, the divine indwelling and hypostatic union contradict reason. Even the Christians alleged that these beliefs originated from the revealed books and had no rational basis. Hence, these beliefs verify the superiority of the divine Books over the use of intellect. Then, they employed rational methods to explain and substantiate these "revelations." However, it is discerned that the divine Books did

not elucidate any of these doctrines. As a result, the Christians appear to have imagined things that could not be justified. He said:

> They claim that the divine Books have revealed these views and that they constitute a matter beyond reason. They hold this belief to be of a degree beyond that of the intellect. They report that the sacred books, according to their thinking, have delivered these views, not that rational argumentation has indicated them. This is in spite of the fact that there is nothing in the divine Books which indicates such things; rather they contain what proves the contrary.[17]

This rational absurdity leads to the similarity between the Christians and some heretical Muslims who claimed the authenticity of pantheism and divine indwelling as something beyond reason. For example, the saying of al-Tilimsānī the shaykh of the people of pantheism: "Among us there is proven by insight (*al-kashf*) what contradicts sound reason."[18] Ibn Taymiyyah then concluded that both adherents of Christianity and heretical doctrine are just following their teachers blindly. The belief of many people is like that of their Shaykh, who are either well known for goodness or thought to possess goodness but actually do not. The views of all these people are of the same kind as those of the Christians, and some of them are worse than those of Christians.[19]

Ibn Taymiyyah suggests that the Christians themselves differ in explaining the formulation of trinity though they agree that what united with Christ, and dwelled in him, was the hypostasis of the Word. Some of them maintained that the Father is the existence, the son the word, and the Holy Spirit the life. Others maintained that the Father is the existence, the son the Word, and the Holy Spirit the power. To still others, the Father is divine Goodness, the Son the Judge, and the Holy Spirit the All-Powerful. Then, they alleged all attributes of God to be included under these three. Even Arius who was in agreement with the expression "the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit," denied the divine indwelling and hypostatic union on the precept that Christ was merely a servant of God sent by Him like the rest of the messengers.

The differences in explaining this formulation led Ibn Taymiyyah to conclude that the hypostases do not permit one to assert the position that God exists, He is living and speaking. He said:

> There are those among them who deny divine indwelling and the hypostatic union, such as the Arians. Arius said that Christ was a servant of God sent by Him, like the rest of the messengers. In agreeing with the others on the expressions 'the Father, the Son, and the Holy spirit' he did not explain it according to what controversialists held about *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād*. Similarly, the Nestorian agree with them on this formulation, and dispute with the Jacobites and Melkites on the belief in the hypostatic union held by the latter groups. [20]

Ibn Taymiyyah also shows that the belief in Christ as the Son of God either through the regular pattern of sonship or as an intellectual production is more irrational than claiming that God has a wife, for he who gives birth must have a spouse. Those who maintained that God has a spouse will formulate their own argumentation as those who claimed begetting. On both accounts, Ibn Taymiyyah sees a clear contradiction to rational thinking. He then offers a sound interpretation to the term Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. He asserts that whenever the prophets spoke about God as "Father," their intention was to imply the mercy of God over the creatures. Here, it means that God is a Creator and one who nurtures mankind by providing sustenance, support and guidance.

Hence, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, there are no implications of a unique relationship between God and Jesus. Their view of Christ as creator is false by revelation and reason and is not mentioned in any of the prophecies which they possess. They try to provide it by producing arguments which do not indicate this at all.[21]

He also contends that in the biblical books, the Holy Spirit is referred to as one of two things – either the holy angel such as Jibrīl, or the support and guidance which God implants in the hearts of prophets and upright persons whether or not that was done through the mediation of the angel. Thus, it is not God. Likewise, when Jesus is called "son" in the Gospel, it could be interpreted to mean "he who is reared or nurtured" that is God's creature. Ibn Taymiyyah even cited the words of Christ to indicate that he did not consider the term "Son" as singularly applicable to himself alone; the words of Christ are "My Father and your Father." Nevertheless, the Christians make the term "son" ambiguous by saying that Christ is a son by nature and the others are sons by adoption, when they put Jesus Christ as a part of His Substance. Then they say:

> And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only son of God, born of the Father before all ages, light form light, true God form true God, from the substance of his Father, born not created, equal to the Father in substance….He is true God from true God, from the substance of his Father.[22]

Ibn Taymiyyah asserts that the sound interpretation of "Baptising people in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" would be a command for people to believe in God, the Prophet whom He sent and in the angel by which God sent down the revelation. Since the Christians identified the "Son" with the word of God and the "Holy Spirit" with the life of God, Ibn Taymiyyah contends that they had actually committed a corruption to the intended meaning (*taḥrīf al-maʿnā)* of the texts of their own sacred books.[23]

The Divine Hypostases

The divine hypostases, according to the "Letter" by the Paul of Antioch, is that "the three names are one God, one Lord, one Creator, called one from eternity to eternity, one living speaking thing – that is essence, word, and life. We hold the essence to be the Father, who is the origin of the other two. The word is the son who is born from Him as the birth of speech from the mind. The life is the Holy Spirit."[24] Ibn Taymiyyah analyzes the meaning of "born from God" as follows:

> They say about the son that he is born form God. If they mean by that he is a necessary attribute of God, the Holy Spirit would be a second son, since life is also God's necessary attribute. if they mean that he resulted from God after he had not existed, it would necessarily follow that God be knowing after He had not been. This view, prescinding from its falsity and blasphemy, also necessitates a parallel view of God's life, that is, that He becomes living after He had not been living.[25]

Ibn Taymiyyah responded that the names of God are numerous as stated in the Qurʾān. Even in the *ḥadīth,* it is reported that God has 99 names. To limit them to three is definitely wrong. Furthermore, God is living, knowing and speaking from the very eternal since these three resemble God's perfect attributes. To say that the life is the "Holy Spirit" indicates that He is only living after He had not

been. Likewise, to interpret the "Son" as the Word of God implies that He is only speaking after He had not been. Hence, it portrays God's imperfection.

In addition, the knowledge of God could not be united with Christ since knowledge is an attribute inseparable from the knower and hence, it is impossible that the knowledge of God could be united with Christ without His essence. Likewise, since knowledge is an attribute, it is impossible for an attribute to create or provide sustenance. It is opposed to the Christians' claim that Christ is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Ibn Taymiyyah also refers to the Nicene Creed, in which he saw an expression of faith in two Gods, especially in the statement: "And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, born of the Father before all ages, light from light, true God from true God, from the substance of his father."[26]

In response, he reasserted that God's knowledge is an attribute of God, and the attribute itself is not a God. In analyzing the Christians' claim that Christ was born not created, equal to the Father in substance, he found that this claim is born of confusion. It is because nothing is equal to the Father in substance except a substance, and therefore, the son is supposed to be a second substance while the Holy Spirit should be the third substance. Thus, there will be three substances and three Gods, which indeed contradict the claim they hold for one substance and one God.

The Incarnation of the Divine Word in Christ

Paul of Antioch states that:

> We hold the incarnation of the creative Word of God in a created man and the birth of both together, i.e., the word with the humanity.… If those things which are subtle like the Holy Spirit and other things do not manifest themselves except in those which are solid, would the Word of God who created the subtle things manifest Himself in that which is not solid? Never! In this way Jesus the son of Mary appeared, since mankind is the most exalted of what God created.…[27]

Ibn Taymiyyah responded that God's words are found in the *Tawrāh*, the Gospel, and other speeches. However, Muslims never call any of these words creator, lord or God. He also stated that the Qur'ān

and other words of God are generically eternal (*qadīm al-nawᶜ*) that is, God is always a speaker by will or He always speaks whenever He wills.

Additionally, Ibn Taymiyyah posed counter arguments against this doctrine by asking which of the two is actually united with the humanity of Christ: the Word with the essence (God) or the Word without the essence. If the first possibility were to be accepted, then Christ would be the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit (all Divine). This possibility is incompatible with the revelation, sound reason, and even to the Christians' perceptions. If the second possibility is accepted, then it would be subject to refutation since the Word itself is an attribute inseparable from its essence, and thus, it does not subsist except in what it describes. Moreover, an attribute itself is not a creating God whereas Christ is perceived to be the creating God. Here, Ibn Taymiyyah portrayed a kind of rebuttal to both possibilities and thus, leads to the invalidity of the so called "divine incarnation of Word in Christ" thesis.

About the divine hypostases, Ibn Taymmiyah concludes that the Christian claims of Jesus's incarnation have neither rational grounds nor revelational evidence. He said:

> The hypostases which they profess-besides the falsity of this notion from reason and revelation-are never mentioned in any sacred book among them, nor is this expression found in a single one of the books of the prophets which they possess, not in the teaching of the apostles. Rather, this is a term which they have invented, and is said to be 'Roman'[28]

Ibn Taymiyyah further analyzes the Christian theological and scriptural data about the "Divine Incarnation." He stated that though Christians embrace the truthfulness of divine incarnation, various rational and revelational proofs against divine incarnation are very much prevalent. He quotes Paul of Antioch's and other Christian theologians' statements about the divine hypostases and analyzes them for comprehension and correction. To take one example, Paul of Antioch wrote about the "Divine Incarnation" that: "when we see things coming into existence, we know that something other than them has brought them into existence, since it is not possible that they come into existence from themselves, for there is contradiction and fluctuation in them." Ibn Taymiyyah refutes as follows:

- You have not seen the coming into existence of all created things, but you have only seen those things whose creation in time may be mentioned, such as clouds, rains, animals, plants and the like. Where is your proof for the rest of the things?
- You should have said, "when the coming into existence of temporal things is known, or the creation in time of created things, or the creation in time of all that is other than God" or something like that which makes it clear that what comes into being in time is everything other than God. To affirm absolutely the coming into existence in time of all things is false.
- Knowledge about something created in time demands knowledge of One who brings into being, that is, knowledge of a necessary creator.[29]

Ḥulūl: Indwelling of God in Christ

Paul of Antioch states: "In this way God became manifest in Jesus the son of Mary, since mankind is the most exalted of what God created."[30] Ibn Taymiyyah admits that the prophets often spoke of God's dwelling on earth, or with His people or in the hearts of believers. However, this dwelling does not mean that the essence of God resides in a person or place. He maintains that elsewhere in the teachings of the prophets, such statements are reiterated as the intellective representation [mental image, similitude] of the knowledge, power, guidance, and love of God resided in believers. Ibn Taymiyyah quotes several Qur'ānic verses and sound *ḥadīth* to substantiate his viewpoints.[31]

In addition, Ibn Taymiyyah reasons that if the *ḥulūl* were to take place, God will choose to dwell in either the body of Ibrāhīm or Muḥammad rather than in Christ. These two prophets are considered the most exalted of mankind since God took them as special friends (*khalīlayn*). Hence, preference of divine indwelling would be more noble and reasonable in either of the two *khalīlayn.*

Ibn Taymiyyah is of the view that the errors committed by Christians with respect to the divine indwelling is shared by many of the innovators. In fact, he argues that the renegades of Islam are in greater error than the Christians. *Hulūl*, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, are of two kinds: Universal which asserts that "Allah has taken

residence in every place" and in particular in which divine indwelling is claimed for a member of the family of the Prophet or to the Ṣūfī masters and others. Ibn Taymiyyah believes that whoever says that Allah has taken residence in or united with one of the companions of the Prophet or one of the Shaykhs is more unacceptable than Christians who hold divine union and indwelling in Christ. This greater error is manifest due to the fact that Christ is superior to all Ṣūfīs and companions of the Prophet.

Qurʾānic Teaching About Christ

Paul of Antioch states: "In the Qurʾān which this man has brought says: The Christ, Jesus the son of Mary, is the messenger of God, His word which He sent down upon Mary, and a Spirit from Him." Allah says in the Qurʾān (4:171):

> O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an apostle of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His apostles. Say not "Trinity," desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is one Allah. Glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs.

This agrees with our view, since it bears witness that he is a man like us in his human nature which he took from Mary, and the Word of God and His Spirit united in him, except that the Word and the Spirit of God is creative, while we are creatures. It also says: "They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but it seemed so to them." Allah says in the Qurʾān (4:157.):

> That they said (boastingly), 'We killed Jesus Christ, the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah, but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not.'

From this statement, the Qurʾān gives evidence for the divine nature of Christ which is the Word of God, which "neither pain nor scorn could touch … by this is indicated his divinity."[32] Ibn Taymiyyah

reiterates the same *āyah* highlighting that the *āyah* is addressed to the Jews. Here, God cursed the Jews for their allegation that they succeeded in killing Christ. Ibn Taymiyyah vehemently opposed the claim that Muḥammad (SAS) demonstrated the divine and human nature in Christ in his teachings. It is clear that his teachings affirmed the messengership of Christ. The Qur᾽ān (5:72) explains the nature of Jesus's mission on earth which was like any other prophets as follows:

> But said Christ: "O Children of Israel! Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord." Whoever joins other gods with Allah, Allah will forbid him the Garden, and the Fire will be his abode. There will for the wrong-doers be no one to help.

Thus, if any Jews claimed that Muḥammad (SAS) rejected Christ and denied his prophetic mission, it would be like the claim of the Christians. They claim that Muḥammad (SAS) said that Christ was the Lord of the universe that the divine nature united with his human nature. However, Muḥammad (SAS) brought what was revealed to men from God and he declared as unbelievers people who said such things. The Qur᾽ān (5:75) explains the nature of Jesus who was one of the prophets as follows:

> Christ the son of Mary was no more than an apostle; many were the apostles that passed away before him. His mother was a woman of truth. They had both to eat their (daily) food. See how Allah doth make His signs clear to them; yet see in what ways they are deluded away from the truth!

The preceding *āyah* is also meant for them since they alleged that Mary, the mother of Christ, committed fornication. He also explains the meaning of the word *al-tawaffi* mentioned in the Qur᾽ān (3:55):

> Behold! Allah says: "O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself and clear thee (of the falsehoods) of those who blaspheme; I will make those who follow thee superior to those who reject faith, to the Day of Resurrection: Then shall ye all return unto me, and I will judge between you of the matters wherein ye dispute.

This verse makes it clear that God, the Almighty, raised Christ from the state of the people of the earth to verify the idea of his descent to earth before the Day of Resurrection, not as the verification of the raising up of Christ's divine nature as upheld by the Christians.

Ittiḥād: Union of God with a Creature

In the last section dealing with Trinity, Ibn Taymiyyah quotes the writing of Saʿīd Ibn Bitrīq who stated: "Through union with that one substratum, the substratum of the creative word of God, Christ was one with the trinity by nature of his divinity and one with the people by nature of his humanity. He was not two, but one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, for he was it [the divine nature], and he was one with all people by combining two different substances-that of the creative divine nature and of the created human nature-by the union in one substance of that of the Word who is a son born from God before all ages and that of the one born of the Virgin Mary at the end of the ages without any separation from the Father or the Holy Spirit."

In response, Ibn Taymiyyah maintains that the formulation of essential *ittiḥād* as understood by the Christians portrayed the dependency of God upon the created beings. If the Creator has the creature as His substratum, it leads to the understanding that both the Creator and the creature have subsistence through the other, and hence, each of the two will be in need of the other, which is clear blasphemy and repugnant to reason. Finally, Ibn Taymiyyah offers what he perceived as the correct understanding of *ittiḥād*. He maintains that *ittiḥād* which exists between the prophets and upright believers and God is the unity of will and action. This unity enables a believer to desire what God desires, hates what He hates, and does what He commands. Hence, such a believer could be described as metaphorically having a union with God.

Conclusion

The entire account of Ibn Taymiyyah's criticism towards the Trinitarian beliefs found in the writings of Paul of Antioch justify the former's decisive stand in upholding what he perceived as the accurate and authentic teachings expounded by all messengers, especially the one taught by Prophet Muḥammad (SAS). His assertion that many of the errors committed by Christians is paralleled by deviations committed by Muslims of earlier generations as well as his own contemporaries signifies his impartiality in assessing the extent of heretical tendencies among the adherents of both religions.

Ibn Taymiyyah's approach in employing both revelation and reason to invalidate all aspects of Trinitarian beliefs is in conformity with Islamic commandments. Islam is a religion which encourages the use of sound mind, on the premise that the mind (ʿ*aql*), if used accordingly, will bring one to the truth. Thus, in numerous verses of the Qurʾān, God exhorts the importance to activate one's mind, particularly in proving His Own Existence and Singularity. However, the rational approach could not be utilized to visualize or to perceive His very Essence, lest the Muslims will fall under the same category with those Christians who visualize God in Christ or even those adherents of other religions including the pagan Arabs during the time of Prophet Muḥammad (SAS) who visualized God through the created beings.

Notes

1. A. Powell, Avril, *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India* (London: Curzon Press, 1993), 13-14.

2. See Imām Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn al-Ṭayyib, al-Bāqilānī, *Tawḥīd al-wāʾil wa Talkhīṣ al-Dalāʾil* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1987); Al-Ḥamadānī, al-QādīʿAbd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-Tawḥīd wa al-ʿAdl* (Cairo: al-Muʾassasāt al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li al-Taʾlīf, 1962); Ibn Ḥazm, Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī Ibn Aḥmad, *Al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā΄ wa al-Niḥal*, (Jeddah: Sharikat Maktabāt ʿUkāẓ, 1982).

3. See al-Bāqilānī, *Tawḥīd al-Awāʾil and Talkhīṣ al-Dalāʾil*; al-Ḥamadāni, *al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-Tawḥīd wa al-ʿAdl.*

4. Ibn Taymiyah, Abu al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm, *al-Jawāb al-Saḥiḥ li Man Baddala Dīn al-Masīḥ,* 2nd ed. (Riyāḍ: Dār al-ʿĀṣimah, 1999).

5. Serajul Haque, *Ibn Taimiya and His Projects of Reform* (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1982), 5–6.

6. Ibid., 8.

7. Victor E. Makari, *Ibn Taymiyyah's Ethics: The Social Factor* (California: American Academy of Religion, 1983), 28–29.

8. F. Michel & S.J, Thomas, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity* (New York: Caravan Books, 1984), 371.

9. Paul of Antioch is called Būlus al-Rāhib al-Antaki. He lived in Lebanon between 1140-1180. He wrote "Letter to a Muslim" approximately in the year

of 1150 mainly to convert Muslims and hence he adopted quite a conciliatory approach and attempted to show affinity between Islam and Christianity. See http://www.sjweb.info/dialogo/document/doc-show.cfm?Number=5.

10. Ibn Taymiyyah, Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm, *Risālatun fī al-ʿUluw*, (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 2003), 33.

11. See, *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 310, 350 and 351.

12. Ibid., 350. See also, Ibn Taymiyyah, *Iqtiḍāʾ al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*: *Mukhālafāt Aṣḥāb al-Jaḥīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1993), 19.

13. *Al-Jawāb al-Saḥīḥ*, 290-310.

14. Ibid., 255.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., 256.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.,. 257.

19 Ibid., 258.

20. Ibid., 257.

21. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Minhāj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah,* v.2 (Maktabah Ibn Taymiyyah, 1989), 207. See also, *Al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 270.

22. *Al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 270, 23. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmūʿāt al-Tawḥīd* (Damascus: Maktab Dār al-Bayān, 1992), 9.

24. *Al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 266

25. Ibid., 268-269.

26. Ibid., 270.

27. Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmūʿāt al-Tawḥīd*, 10; *al-Jawāb al-Saḥīḥ*, 86-287.

28. *Al-Jawāb, al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 264.

29. Ibid., 264.

30. Ibid., 288.

31 He quoted, for instance, from the Qurʾānic verses 6:3 and 30:28. He also quoted a number of *Aḥādīth al-Qudsīyyah* to validate the idea on the dwelling of God's love and remembrance in man, and not His very essence.

32. *Al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 303-304.